

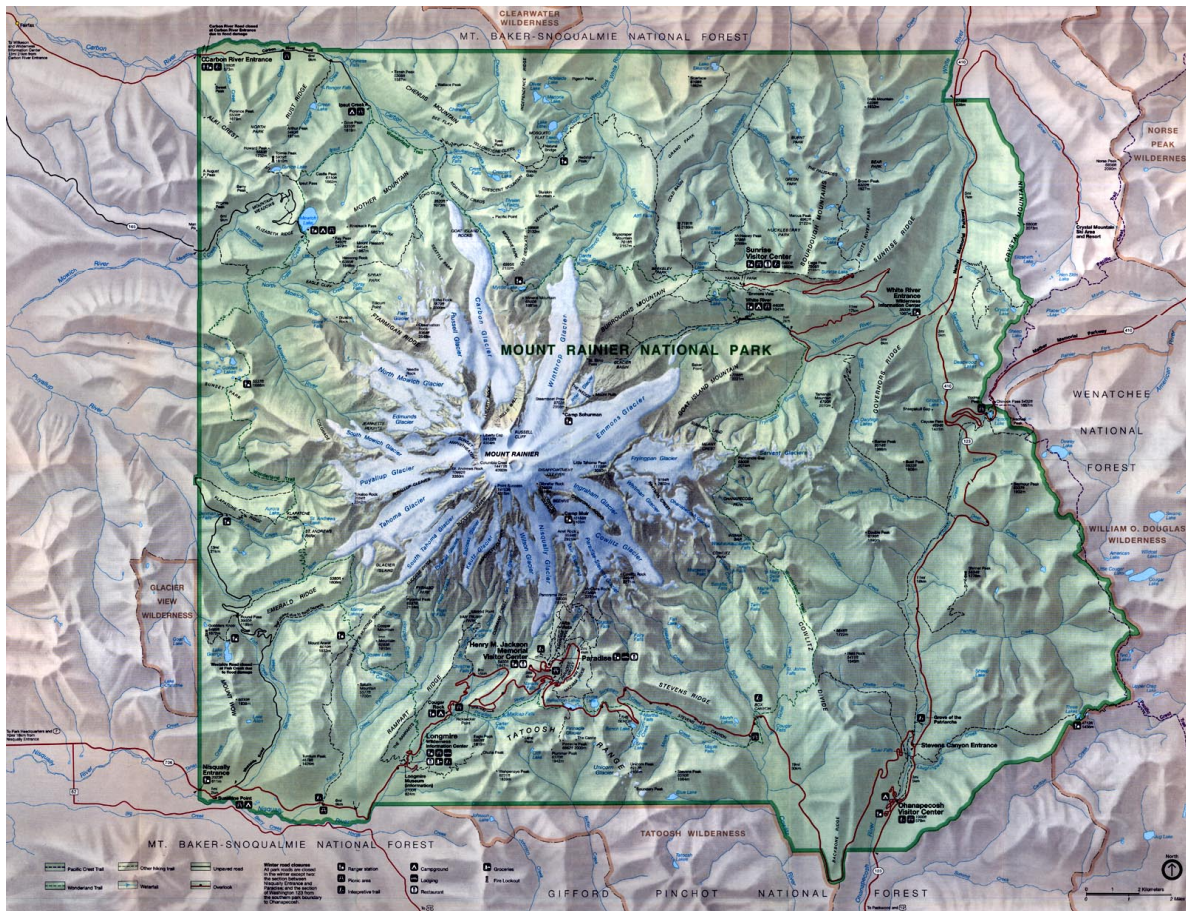
Report

Mount Rainier National Park

■ 1.0 Site Description

Mount Rainier National Park is located in west-central Washington State, approximately two hours south of Seattle. The park contains dense stands of old growth forest, scenic views of glaciers and mountain vistas, alpine meadows and wildflowers, and miles of hiking trails. The summit of Mount Rainier is a popular mountaineering destination, with thousands of successful ascents each year. Overall visitation is approximately 2,000,000 per year, with many visitors coming from the nearby Seattle and Tacoma urban areas (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Park Map



The park encompasses more than 235,000 acres, ranging from 1,610 feet to 14,410 feet in elevation. Visitation is focussed in two major activity areas and several smaller sites. The Paradise area, at 5,400 feet, is the site of the park's major Visitor Center, the Paradise Inn lodging facility, a picnic area, and the starting point for the largest number of climbers using the upper portion of the mountain. Sunrise is another high-altitude activity area, with a campground, Visitor Center, and concession services, but no lodging. Smaller activity areas include Longmire, the Carbon River area, Mowich Lake, Ohanapecosh and numerous trailheads located along the park's roadway system.

The park is open year-round, but in the winter access is limited. Visitors may enter at the Nisqually Entrance (in the southwest corner of the park) and travel to the Paradise area. Visitors also may enter the park on the southeast and travel to Ohanapecosh, or they may travel along the Carbon River road in the northwest corner of the park. The rest of the road system is closed due to deep snow and avalanche danger.



■ 2.0 Existing ATS

There is no regularly scheduled public transit service offered to or within Mount Rainier National Park. Tour services are offered by Grayline of Seattle, which operates an average of one tour trip per day in the summer. Two other operators provide chartered shuttle service to the park from Sea-Tac airport. These shuttles are used primarily by customers of the climbing guide service that operates out of Paradise. The park concessioner offers an employee shuttle service during the summer months.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Visitor use in the most popular destinations in the park, Paradise, Sunrise, Carbon River, and Mowich Lake results in parking demand that exceeds the available supply of parking

on sunny summer weekends. Visitors park along roadsides up to one mile from the activity areas and walk along the roads to reach their destinations. The roadside parking causes damage to fragile plants and soils and it exposes visitors to hazards from passing traffic.

The park is completing a General Management Plan (GMP), which will define appropriate levels of visitor use throughout the park. The plan also will define the amount of visitor parking that can be accommodated in each activity area while preserving the natural and cultural resources of the park.

The alternatives being considered in the GMP include shuttle services to some of the park's activity areas. Shuttles are being considered where the visitation capacity of an area exceeds the appropriate capacity of parking facilities.



■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The needs for Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) in Mount Rainier will depend on the adopted future plan for the park in the GMP. The plan is scheduled for public review during the year 2000. After the plan is adopted, detailed planning for ATS would begin.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

BRW with Dames & Moore. *Mount Rainier Transportation Feasibility Study, Final Report*. May 1995.

National Park Service. *Draft General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. March 13, 2000.